

Lenten Sermon Midweek 3
“A Miracle of Miracles”

Text: Genesis 39:1–21; Luke 22:31–51

Luther calls it “a miracle of miracles.” That Joseph doesn’t lose hope, that Joseph doesn’t lose faith, that Joseph doesn’t give in to temptation and lose his virginity in a shameful and wicked sin it is a miracle of miracles.

Let’s not forget that Joseph was just a boy. He was just seventeen years old when his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites. We aren’t told how old Joseph was by the time he rose to prominence in the house of Potiphar. But let’s say that he celebrated a birthday somewhere along the line. Let’s assume he’s eighteen. We know that he’s a handsome fellow. And we also know that he has the kind of character and faith and wisdom that few men of any age possess.

The devil is attacking Joseph on two different fronts. On the one hand, the devil is tempting him to doubt and despair and defeat, leading him to conclude that he’s been forgotten and forsaken by God even as he was betrayed by his own brothers.

How easy it would have been for Joseph to abandon the faith he had been taught by his father. How easy it would have been to give in to despair and depression or to be consumed by hatred for his betraying brothers.

As if that wasn't enough, his boss's wife is trying to seduce him on a daily basis. It would have been so easy to give in to that temptation so easy for Joseph to justify a sexual liaison. What harm would there be? Who would ever know?

Luther expressed it this way: ***“Joseph spurns and rejects an opportunity so convenient and so full of safety, power, favor, and pleasure”*** (AE 7:77). But Joseph does not waver or equivocate. He calls adultery what it is. He calls sexual immorality what it is. He says, ***“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”*** (v 9).

From where does Joseph (eighteen-year-old Joseph!) get this strength and clarity of character? How does he so clearly differentiate between right and wrong? Please bear in mind, he's got no Sixth Commandment to draw upon, no catechism to consult, no pastor to preach to him.

(The two tablets of stone and Mount Sinai are still over 450 years in the future, and Luther's Small Catechism is more than three thousand years down the line.) Nor can Joseph just crack open his Bible for strength and guidance to sustain him in his time of trial. (There was no Bible written yet!)

All Joseph has is the Law of God written in his heart and the promises of God passed down from his father. And yet, with only those little crumbs to draw upon miracle of miracles! faith reigns in the heart of this young man. Two thousand years before the apostle Paul would implore the Christians at Corinth to flee from sexual immorality because their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18–20), Joseph fled from sexual immorality, recognizing that his body was a temple of the Holy Spirit.

This has all been written down and recorded for us. It's being preached and proclaimed for us. Because the temptations to sexual immorality and adultery are everywhere today. Potiphar's wife, with her promises of sex and sin without consequences she's everywhere. She's on our televisions and our computer screens. The devil never quits, never eases up, never stops seeking to violate our chastity and destroy our faith.

And so, this episode from the life of Joseph comes to confront us here tonight. And we know that this episode is true that it really happened because of the Bible's brutal honesty. Because Joseph's great faith and his steadfast refusal to sin did not result in applause and accolades and promotions. Instead, no good deed goes unpunished. Things go from bad to worse out of the frying pan and into the fire and Joseph descends into the hell of prison.

If that's what happened to Joseph whose faith and life were above reproach in every way should not we expect far worse? With our faltering faith and our sin-filled lives? We should indeed expect nothing but temporal and eternal punishment . . . were it not for our new and greater Joseph.

Jesus is our new and greater Joseph. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Jesus took on the temptations of a thousand wives of Potiphar and never, ever, took the bait never did what would have been convenient or easy and pleasurable. Why not? Because he battled temptation for us as our sacred substitute. Where we fail, he succeeds. Where we stumble, he stands firm.

Where we are weak, he is strong.

And miracle of miracles! Jesus undertakes a great exchange with us. He takes our guilt and gives us his innocence. He bears our sin and absolves us of everything. He drinks deeply from the cup of God's wrath against our sin, so that we might sample the sweet wine that is his blood once shed for us, for the forgiveness of all our sins. He takes our punishment and dies our death so that we might die to sin and rise again to life everlasting.

Just like Joseph, Jesus humbled himself and made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave. Just like Joseph, Jesus went around doing good in all things: preaching the Gospel, casting out demons, cleansing lepers, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, stilling the storms, and even raising the dead. But for Jesus like Joseph there would be no applause or accolades or promotions. No good deed would go unpunished for this good man. Shouts of "Hosanna!" would give way to cries for crucifixion. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. One of his own betrays him with a kiss.

So, it goes for Jesus. So, it goes for Joseph. And so. it goes for us.

When Jesus, like Joseph, takes on temptation, it is for us.

This world will little note nor long remember the times when we stand firm against temptation. When we, by the grace of God, lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do when we say no to sin and yes to the Lord Jesus, who loves us and gave himself for us the angels may be rejoicing, but their cheers won't reach our ears. Luther says, "***You must never hope the world will acknowledge . . . your faithfulness and diligence, for it does the opposite***" (AE 7:97). Like Joseph, our good conduct could even land us in prison, or worse.

But, miracle of miracles, we are precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Holy Baptism, he has made our bodies to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. We belong to the Lord body and soul redeemed by Christ the Crucified.

Amen